

2020-21 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #21-3

The Fur Harvest Survey provides estimates of (1) numbers of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, (2) values of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, and (3) distribution of the harvest among resource users. This project is supported in part by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program (Project W-99-R, Job 102.7 and 102.8).

METHODS

State law requires licensed fur buyers to maintain records and submit reports of all raw furs purchased. We mailed report forms and written instructions to licensed buyers about 10 days before the opening of the muskrat trapping season. Buyers who failed to report by the deadline were sent 2 reminders by first class mail.

Buyers provided estimates of (1) raw fur purchases from Illinois hunters and trappers, (2) average pelt prices for all sizes and grades, and (3) percentages of pelts taken by fur hunters. We corrected estimates for non-response and out-of-state pelt sales reported by Conat et al. (2016). Individuals who captured a river otter or bobcat were required to purchase a permit within 48 hours; sales of pelts were based on sales of permits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Department issued 22 permits to fur buyers during 2020-21. Based on a 91% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 49,520, a decrease of 47% from 2019-20 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers decreased 55% to \$293,113. Raccoon, beaver and coyote accounted for 77% of the total harvest and 80% of its value. Coyote pelts were just under 16% of the total harvest and comprised 44% of the total fur value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 1% for striped skunk to 42% for raccoon; they were intermediate for opossum (10%), red fox (17%)

and coyote (27%). Hunters accounted for 38% of the raccoon harvest in 2020-21.

Today, pelt values are driven mainly by demand from foreign markets such as Russia and China. Economic conditions, monetary exchange rates, political events and severity of winters in overseas countries shape fur markets in North America and contribute to their volatility. Overall, demand for wild furs remained poor during 2020-21 because of economic conditions in major markets and a glut of wild and ranch-raised goods from past seasons. Pelt values were still good for western coyote and bobcat but overall, prices remained at very low levels.

Sales of trapping licenses increased to 7238 in 2020-21, up from 6718 in 2019-20. During 2019-20, approximately 7,164 raccoon hunters spent 62,610 days afield and 22,843 coyote hunters spent 205,170 days afield (Walberg et al. 2020).

Pelts sales fell short of historical averages during the 2020-21 season.

LITERATURE CITED

Williams, B.D., L.K. Campbell, C.A. Miller and L.J. Stephens. 2019. 2018-2019 Illinois Trapper Report: Harvest, Effort, and Marketing Practices. Job Completion Report, Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration W-112-R-28. INHS Technical Report 2019 (37). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, IL. 61pp.

Wahlberg, E.M., B. D. Williams and C.A. Miller. 2019. 2018-2019 Illinois hunter harvest report. Illinois Natural History Survey Technical Report 30. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2020-21 vs. *2019-20.

Species	Number of pelts sold ^a		Change in sales from 2019-20 ^b	Average price per pelt (dollars)		Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from 2020-21 - 2019-20	
	2020-21	2019-20		2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20 (dollars)		
Muskrat	8,041	9234	(-13)	3.11	2.77	25,007.51	25,578.18	-570.67	(-2)
Mink	384	818	(-53)	4.00	3.13	1536.00	2560.34	-1024.34	(-40)
Raccoon	26,136	55,070	(-53)	3.07	4.03	80,237.52	221,932.10	-141,694.58	(-64)
Opossum	552	630	(-12)	0.57	0.33	314.64	207.90	+106.74	(+51)
Red fox	384	462	(-17)	5.60	6.97	2150.40	3220.14	-1069.74	(-33)
Gray fox	2	5	(-60)	5.00	7.00	10.00	35.00	-25.00	(-71)
Beaver	4,135	12,177	(-66)	6.20	6.47	25,637.00	78,785.19	-53,148.19	(-68)
River otter	1065 ^c	1174 ^c	(-9)	16.07	17.02	17,114.55	19,981.48	-2866.93	(-14)
Striped skunk	560	501	(+12)	4.34	4.31	2430.40	2159.31	+271.09	(+13)
Weasel	4	0	(-)	0.50	-	2.00	0	+2.00	(-)
Coyote	7,902	13,255	(-40.4)	16.21	21.20	128,091.42	281,006.00	-152,914.58	(-54)
Badger	16	15	(+7)	7.53	9.27	120.48	139.05	-18.57	(-13)
Bobcat	339 ^{c,d}	306 ^{c,d}	(+11)	30.86	30.32	10,461.54	9277.92	+1183.62	(+13 ^d)
Total/mean	49,520	93,647	(-47)			293,113.46	644,882.61	-351,769.62	(-55)

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by Conat et al. (2016).

^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

^cBased on sales of Temporary Pelt Permits.

^dfifth bobcat season – data not comparable